**The Thesis Committee for Graham Thomas Schmidt**
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# Revealing Authentic Intention as a Director

**APPROVED BY**
**SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

**Supervisor:**

KJ Sanchez

Elizabeth Engelman

Kirk Lynn

Steven Dietz

# Revealing Authentic Intention as a Director

**By**

**Graham Thomas Schmidt**

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# Dedication

For Andy.

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# Abstract

## Revealing Authentic Intention as a Director

Graham Thomas Schmidt, MFA

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Supervisor: KJ Sanchez

In this thesis, I describe a model for theater directing inspired by an intimate moment in my life. I use the term "authentic" to describe this model, since its features spring from the core of my being, and align with prevailing definitions of authenticity: "true to one's own personality, spirit, or character." I then use this model to analyze the ways authenticity manifested through three directing projects I pursued as an MFA candidate, and factors hindering expression of my authentic directorial voice.

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## 1. Authentic Directing

In April of 2014, my brother died. The event took place in a hospital. My father, mother and I were present as support was withdrawn, and Andy passed away. I have always recounted that the experience had a rehearsed quality, since Andy had always had fragile health, and we'd envisioned end-of-life scenarios repeatedly.

But there is a deeper sense in which we performed on the day he died. We acted out one of the oldest rituals: Sitting vigil. While highly sophisticated and nuanced, this ritual required no training—only presence, the acknowledgement of a shared purpose beyond ourselves, and a desire to be together in a transformative moment. The theatrical elements of this performance were unmistakable. And while there was no director in this ritual, the leader was my mother.

She prepared us for the event by talking with my father and me, separately and together. We discussed what was about to happen and its consequences. She took the lead in conversing with physicians and consulted with my father who, diminished by a stroke, nonetheless deserved the dignity of participation in determining the manner of his son's death. In the same way, a director prepares actors for rehearsals and performances, and coordinates the efforts of disparate teams.

Mom took the lead in establishing how the ritual would move through time and space. At the appointed time, we entered the room together and drew the curtain and established a sacred boundary. Our blocking reflected our relationship to Andy, and each

other: Mom seated, stroking his forehead. Dad beside her, just as he'd been when Mom brought Andy's body into the world. I stood behind them with a hand on each of their shoulders. We adopted a restrained movement vocabulary, cued by Mom's slow, repeated strokes of Andy's forehead. These minute gestures heightened the room's stillness. The text we improvised, prompted by Mom's words ("Thank you, Andy…goodnight, sweet pea…") was also gentle and repetitive, along themes of gratitude, affection, and farewells.

There was a transformation at the heart of the ritual: Andy's life function ceased. Our relationships to one another also transformed. I left behind feelings of inadequacy as a sibling. I witnessed my mother and father see a child out of this world—the end of a journey that began when they gave him life. Our performance during those five minutes cradled, supported and echoed Andy's bodily transformation, deepening a multilayered narrative among all of us.

My mother's actions—which I compare to directing—helped bring about this transformation. They expressed her intention for our family to cross a threshold together. Rather than attending to her own experience, Mom oriented herself toward service in those moments. In Joseph Campbell's formulation, "the ultimate aim of the [hero's] quest must be neither release nor ecstasy for onself, but the wisdom and power to serve others." The experience of raising Andy—a substantial quest—had prepared Mom to serve our family with this ritual.

Mom's conduct in this context exhibited critical features of what I refer to as "authentic" theater directing. These features include a strong purpose, the selection of a

performance gesture that is appropriate to that purpose, expression of that purpose in time and space (and command of the skills necessary to do so), and attentiveness to the needs of the community that brings about and witnesses the performance.

I use these features of authenticity to reflect on my work as an MFA candidate at UT. I also describe factors that have supported or inhibited the expression of authenticity in my practice. Through this analysis, I arrive at an approach to directing that is authentic to me.

## 2. *A Nervous Breakdown*

*A Nervous Breakdown* was a project that spanned most of my time as an MFA candidate. It began in my first semester, had a draft staging that was well received, and a remount the following semester. The piece was originally conceived as a way to reckon with the experience of witnessing my brother's death. I conducted a series of interviews with physicians, fascinated by the insight that our wounds makes us better able to heal and address suffering in the world. While *A Nervous Breakdown* featured a strong sense of service toward physicians as a community and sense of purpose, the performance gesture was ill-defined. As a result, its realization in performance lacked force or impact. This piece remains at a developmental stage.

I focused on my brother's death because it was a mystical experience for me that provoked many powerful emotions, including guilt. I thought that I ought to have felt devastated by losing him, but I experienced his death as a moment of catharsis and connection. I couldn't resolve this internal conflict at the time. I was also interested in finding an outlet for my interest in Chekhov, whose work I'd studied and staged for many years before I began my MFA. The two subjects seemed intertwined to me. The death of Chekhov's brother had been a pivotal moment in his life, and it happened when Chekhov was around the same age as me. Chekhov suspended his artistic practice at that time, while my practice accelerated in the wake of my brother's death.

I began to gravitate toward people with whom I connected over the above concerns—grief, suffering, pain, medicine, and art. One was an old friend who balanced

careers as a writer and a physician—just like Chekhov. I was fascinated by the immediacy of the impact her medical practice made on the world, and how art could have a similarly immediate impact. I decided to focus on the experience of being a medical practitioner.

In the fall of my second year, I discovered a form that would allow me to continue conversations with doctors around pain, suffering, and meaning-making. Documentary theater, which I'd first encountered during a workshop of MFA playwright Megan Tabaque's *Invisible Women* over the preceding summer, extended the promise of creating art from conversations with experts. Perfect! My first interview validated my enthusiasm for the approach. A pediatric palliative care physician stunningly revealed:

> *When I stopped practicing pediatric oncology, I cried for two months straight. I would cry when the sun came up, I'd cry pouring a cup of coffee. It was like all the grief I'd been storing up for those twenty years came pouring out of me.*

This interviewee became a powerful ally, helping me network with physicians at Dell Children's Medical Center, and the University of Texas at Austin's new Medical School. My advisor, KJ Sanchez—a documentary theater writer and director—offered expertise and encouragement as I crafted my interview strategies.

I decided to make the piece into a dance-theater performance. I gathered collaborators for this project, including a choreographer, Erica Gionfriddo, with whom

I'd worked before grad school, and who had begun teaching at UT. Before long, I had a large team committed. I knew the play would begin with voice-over from a podcast interview with a physician named Rachel Remen recounting the creation myth from the Kabbala. The story not only provided evocative and sensual imagery for a dance section that I choreographed—chaos, darkness, light, a shattered vessel—but also established a hopeful tone for the production. I organized the most compelling sections from my 100+ pages of interview transcripts into an arc that roughly echoed the phases of the Kabbalistic creation myth: Chaos, hope, destruction, guilt, and reintegration. I worked with my collaborators to gather the scenes into a unified whole.

When we opened the piece during the Cohen New Works Festival, it was met with polarized responses from audiences. Some audience members recommended further investigation of the Kabbala; some said the Kabbala was not apropos. Some craved more interviews; some said the interviews were maudlin. Some said the choreography needed more grounding in the subject matter; some said the choreography was beautiful.

I was confused about how to process this widely divergent feedback, but one group was unambiguous in its support: Physicians. Those interviewees who saw it said that it was faithful to their experience, even "nailed it." Buoyed by this support, excited to have staged my first self-authored work, and confident after a semester of steady growth and achievement, I decided to revise and remount the piece in the following semester.

In retrospect, the most important level on which *A Nervous Breakdown* succeeded was in its service to physicians as a community. Their eagerness to support a remount emphasized this fact. However, it was less intentional in its artistic intentions, and the

ways those intentions were expressed in the world. The script was fuzzy; its narrative logic was fuzzy; the role of dance was fuzzy; the staging was fuzzy.

Part of this was due to the labor-intensive nature of documentary theater as a form. The fourteen interviews I'd conducted yielded powerful moments, but in order to craft a narrative I would need to double or triple that amount. *A Nervous Breakdown* was driven by an orientation toward service, but needed extensive work and stronger focus in order to become an authentic expression of my artistic voice.

The story of my process does not have a happy ending. I procrastinated for most of the summer. I paid lip service to the idea of making progress, but I did not conduct further documentary interviews. Hawthorne wrote, "No man can wear one face to himself and another to the multitude without finally getting bewildered as to which one is true." Indeed, by the end of the summer, I was bewildered about my project's aims, and my role in it—past and present. I did not trust myself, and therefore, could not extend trust to anyone else.

As rehearsals approached, I decided to create a script that would be original to the new ensemble. I ditched the name *A Nervous Breakdown*—a title of a Chekhov short story—and took up *In The Glare*, which was a quote drawn from one of my documentary interviews. I started work toward the end of the summer, but had trouble regaining momentum.

Recruitment of new collaborators was difficult. Since my performance slot overlapped with the fall dance piece, my dancers were booked, as was Erica, my primary collaborator. The designers were assigned to departmental shows; I recruited new ones.

My dramaturg, Khristian, who'd been a source of profound inspiration and fierce support, took to directing his own work.

Far behind in my process, I tried to adapt, but I could not articulate my vision or reasons for wanting to make the piece anymore. I felt self-conscious about the incomplete nature of the script, and lacked confidence in my ability to move forward. The purpose and delight that had animated my earlier conversations with collaborators and medical professionals had evaporated, and were replaced by a heightened sense of self-consciousness.

I was blocked. I literally didn't know what I was doing. In *The Actor and the Target*, Declan Donnelan writes that actors who say, "I don't know what I'm doing" have lost connection with their target—that which they are trying to affect on stage. Having lost sight of my reason for making the piece and without a sense of how I hoped it would affect an audience, I felt similarly lost. Donnelan describes the experience of creative blockage with remarkable clarity:

> *…Two basic symptoms recur, namely paralysis and isolation—an inner locking and an outer locking. And, at worst, an overwhelming awareness of being alone, a creeping sense of being both responsible and powerless, unworthy and angry, too small, too big, too cautious, too…me.*

This is precisely what I experienced, and the early rehearsals bore out this insecurity. I would bring large portions of text to my ensemble, and we read them

together. I solicited feedback and responded most powerfully to their assurances that the material was, indeed, interesting. I was using the rehearsals to seek validation for my interviews, rather than building new material. It was a grotesque distortion of what a rehearsal process should be, but it reflected my own distorted interior life. And because there was no inner beacon guiding my exploration, I was easily swayed, convinced by the last smart thing anyone said in rehearsal. I did not plan ahead, but bounced from one rehearsal to another. Predictably, we began to spin our wheels.

The weight of responsibility to find structure and momentum was overwhelming. Continuing to bow to fear of judgment was no longer an option. To do so was to court disaster. I canceled several rehearsals in order to write a script that would embrace the key transcripts and be semi-autobiographical, with my brother's death at its heart. What emerged was a story about a director who is fired—an existential death. It took several days of workshopping and rewriting before I realized, after the heady experience of bringing forth a script, that it was not ready for a showing and further, the cast was confused as to what we were even doing anymore. I pivoted again, reverting to a bare-bones version of the original *Nervous Breakdown* script. I felt an obligation to the performers to provide a structure for a show that was achievable. It would be modest, but I felt that it was the best I could provide. The rest of the rehearsal process was more focused, but it was discouraging to open a show that lacked the clarity of expression necessary to support my artistic voice.

The showing did yield some important feedback. I had cut the Kabbalistic creation myth from the piece entirely, in the interest of tightening the piece's focus. However, this

change stripped the play of its optimism and faith in the profession. I also cut dance from the piece. This exposed the weakness of the script, since much of the story in the first staging had been conveyed through staging, and particularly dance. The script needs extensive work.

*A Nervous Breakdown* provided several lessons, in retrospect. First: Service to a community and a strong intention are necessary features of authentic performance, but certainly not sufficient. I am still not sure what the appropriate performance gesture is for this piece, and it lacks clarity in its expression. Its needs include: A more focused question around which to shape the investigation; Interviews with more doctors, so that younger physicians' emotional response to trauma is not portrayed as representative; more interviews with doctors who work in chronic care environments (rather than acute care). With this work behind me, I'll have a much better chance at developing a piece with a strong narrative drive. I will also have a better sense of how dance might support the piece's expression. There is no way to test my hypothesis that the piece needs this work without many more interviews.

Further, I bowed to fear of public judgment and became passive, abandoning my plan to pursue further interviews. In fact, my passivity—while comfortable at the time—ensured that the experience of staging *In The Glare* would be painful. Declan Donnelan's *The Actor and the Target* contains a parable that illuminates my predicament:

> *Imagine that you are hungry and have no food in your flat. It doesn't matter how often you search the fridge: it will remain empty. The only place to get food is*

*outside. If you stay in, you'll starve, no matter how often you rummage round the wire racks…It seems so safe at home, it seems so frightening on the streets, but this is a delusion.*

*It is not safe at home. It is only safe on the streets. Don't go home.*

"Staying home" resulted in tremendous disappointment. If the greatest danger is an end to my practice, then passivity is the greatest threat of all. Passivity is destructive—like smoking cigarettes, or eating too much food, or refraining from exercise. There is safety only in conscious, intentional and rigorous pursuit of craft. The best example of this, for me, was the experience of directing *Galactic Orphans,* by Megan Tabaque, during the 2017 UT New Theater Showcase.

### 3. *Galactic Orphans*

My production of *Galactic Orphans* was an authentic manifestation of my directorial vision and voice. The process was marked by strong intentions, clear expression of those intentions in performance, positive rapport and excellent communication among the production, design and performance elements. This authentic directing emerged within a new play development process. From the first time I encountered the script until opening night, almost eight months later, it underwent extensive revision. I'd struggled in developmental contexts before and during grad school, so *Orphans* showed me how much I had grown as a new play director.

Further, since I had not staged a full-length play for 18 months before *Orphans* and had engaged in substantial physical theater training in the interim, the play showed me how much my directorial voice had deepened, thanks to this training. I had more precision and expressivity in my work than in the past. Finally, I was gratified that *Orphans* had so many visible signs of success. For these reasons, the production is a touchstone for me as a director.

*Galactic Orphans* is about two siblings, Cory, 12, and her older brother, Ted. Their mother died in combat when Cory was an infant, leaving Ted to raise her, almost by himself, in the seven years since. Along with Ted's best friend, adolescent Richie ("Ri"), a teenager who abuses substances and seems on the spectrum of depression, they find meaning and entertainment in the video game, *Archangel*. The play captures a critical moment in Cory's life. After her first period, a character from the video game, the woman

cyborg warrior, Catara zaps into Cory and Ted's basement, and transforms into Cory's mother. On a mission to give Cory strength and wisdom, Catara-as-Mom also seeks one final moment of stillness with her daughter. This discovery of a warrior legacy enables Cory to cross a threshold into adolescence.

At the core of my experience of *Galactic Orphans* was my relationship with the playwright, Megan Tabaque. A major element of my working experience with Megan was learning to submit my work to her judgment, and make myself vulnerable. Megan was a vocal, assertive playwright. Now, I understand the discomfort I occasionally experienced working with her as akin to what Anne Bogart calls "embarrassment," in her magisterial essay:

> *Feeling truly exposed is rarely a comfortable sensation…[but] it is a good omen because it signifies that you are meeting the moment fully, with an openness to the new feelings that it will engender.*

Early on, I had feared judgment and conflict, but we found common ground repeatedly, and I was gratified to see my intentions—and her play—realized in performance. The sense of exposure and risk throughout the production is what I choose to remember and hold as a critical experience.

My responsibility and leadership of the artistic team, and the patrons who experienced *Galactic Orphans*, took time to emerge. I did not begin the process on solid ground with Megan, or the team. During early design meetings, I arrived with general

impressions and what I thought was a backwards-and-forwards knowledge of the script, hoping that coherent and forceful designs would magically emerge from these meetings. Since I did not enter these meetings with intention, nothing forceful emerged. In fact, there was a void of leadership, which the playwright filled. I remember Megan animatedly articulated certainties, images, vision. She was directing the show. Somebody had to do it, after all.

The audition process occasioned a radical change in my sense of my role in the process. Due to passivity and disengagement, I became almost irrelevant to the production I was assigned to lead, and I could not let this stand. Going into the process, Megan and I had named several performers whom we hoped would be available, and Eli Weinberg was at the top of the list. I'd served as assistant director on a production in which he starred during the previous year, and had a strong relationship with Eli. He stole the audition. The rest of the roles fell into place without any dispute. The decisions were so easy that anyone could have made them.

The problem was that I did not. While I gave input, I was insufficiently prepared. I'd practically abdicated responsibility to perform one of the most important decisions on any production. Megan had structured and envisioned the second round of auditions. Megan had spoken on behalf of the production during meetings about the four-production showcase. Megan, I perceived, had seized the reigns. While I had explained these experiences to myself as exceptions to a rule—moments when I allowed the playwright to step forward, with the understanding that I would eventually take over—I perceived,

on the heels of the audition process, that I needed to step up. If I failed to do so, I risked losing the opportunity to direct the production at all.

Looking back, I understand from this experience that the role of director is not enshrined. There is no mystical rule that commands respect or confers wisdom, no magical power emanating from the title. Rather, it is a position that is earned every day with the conscious decision to prepare, envision, and execute the duties associated with that role. From the moment auditions ended, I decided that, no matter how exposed to judgment I would feel, I could no longer watch my production be directed by anyone but me. I could not abdicate my responsibility to lead. The disruption brought on by the audition process triggered substantial, sustained effort. Through this work, I also found a deep connection with the play itself, and an almost boundless sense of expressive potential in it.

I started by elaborating my scenic breakdown and holding weekly meetings with the Integrated Media designer—a critical collaborator on the project. I also engaged the sound designer with a preliminary cue list—something akin to a rough first draft. Since the sound cues would be extensive, this was a critical step. Lastly, I developed an extensive written response to Megan's play, detailing the points where I connected, and articulating the outstanding questions I had.

I can mark the moment when I fully embraced my role as director, and its attendant responsibilities. Over the phone one day, I told Megan that I would continue to advocate for my vision of the production. I would never shut her down, but I said that we had to project more unity than we had to that point. If we failed to do so, I said, then we risked

the entire production seizing up, since the members of the team would be afraid to cross one or the other of us. In that moment, I'd assumed responsibility for holding the artistic team together in community, and declared an intention to be fully present. The discomfort of embarrassment returned, but I held steady. While uncomfortable, this was the only state in which I could function at my highest level, and be my best, most intentional, aggressively rigorous self.

Another reason that I consider this process to have been "authentic" is that Megan and I related to a purpose that, to my mind, lay somewhere in between and beyond both our individual visions. Each of us had a profound desire to engage with particular moments in the play, but not always in the same way. There were gaps. For example, I gravitated toward the play's depiction of a mother who so loved her children that she traveled the infinite expanse of the universe for one last sweet stillness in their presence. Megan, on the other hand, considered the reunion at the play's climax to have catapulted Cory, the young protagonist, into her future. Both are true assertions, but the generative friction between us in our work gave the precise moment of connection between mother and daughter unique power. This divergence in our points of view occurred repeatedly throughout the process, enriching moment after moment.

This raises another point that is critical to authenticity: Implementation. A production cannot be authentic unless the director has the level of craft necessary to realize their vision in time and space. By deploying simple, basic elements of craft with rigor and intention, I found far deeper expressivity in the production than any I'd done before.

One of the competencies I deployed was transactional analysis. While I'd deployed this technique on my Chekhov productions prior to starting my MFA, *Galactic Orphans* provided the perfect laboratory to see how much I'd grown. By the time rehearsals began, it was a compact and actable drama with sharp beats, strong conflict, and largely consistent intentions among all characters. I used transactional analysis to model precision in the way that I discussed the play for the performers, and to flesh out dramaturgical problems in the text. I found that the work enabled the performers to become their own best critics, and sharpen their own performances.

Going into winter break, I augmented my existing scenic breakdown to include actions, stakes, obstacles and objectives for every character. During table work, I shared and drew out actions from the actors, working beat-by-beat, modeling my language after the directors I'd assisted in my time at UT: Brant Pope and Robert Ramirez. The results were surprising and delightful, and had benefits beyond my intentions. The precise table work generated extensive dramaturgical feedback on the play for Megan. As we worked through the play, I established an atmosphere wherein the best questions—rather than answers—were the most valuable contributions to our discussion. Of course, I offered certainties where it was warranted and helpful. However, by allowing the actors to encounter and explicitly wrestle with the most vexing questions about their roles, our table work empowered the playwright to diagnose the dramaturgical knots in the script. There was far more actionable feedback from the actors than I would have been able to generate by working alone. Finally, the table work made me a more helpful director by

cluing me in to where the performers were struggling. When table work concluded, we were far ahead of our planned schedule, with excellent morale.

*Orphans* was also a litmus test for observing how much my directorial voice had deepened, due to the physical theater training I'd engaged in and observed as an assistant director since my last full production. I choreographed the dance sequence myself—a minor victory—but I observed the most growth in my staging of naturalistic scenes. Overall, my staging had added depth and expressivity.

The set on which this blocking took place was simple: Stage left, a piano with a bench. Stage right, some empty boxes. Dead-center, a couch facing a TV. Almost every scene utilized the couch, and I used simple rules to add visual variety: No stage picture would be balanced, and no scene played on the couch would have a "default" look of two characters sitting beside one another, facing straight ahead. Beyond that, I had the characters interact with the couch in unusual ways. They leapt on it; they stood on its arms; they jumped onto it from behind; they leaned on it with their backs to the audience; they sat facing one another on opposite ends; they sprinted across its pillows; they tumbled backward onto its seats, resting upside-down with their legs in the air and faces toward the audience. The adventurous ways in which the performers used the couch comprised a key factor in the play's highly physical, kinetic quality.

The dance scene itself served multiple dramaturgical purposes. It was a time-lapse of lengthy video game play, so it needed fast motion, or "strobe motion" as the script says. It also needed to tell the story of Cory's negotiating her way into the male-dominated world of video gaming. She needed a personal victory, then a shared victory

with Teddy and Ri. The sound designer had keyed into the feel of the scene quickly and developed a driving, major-key guitar riff. I broke it down into segments and planned a series of lifts, jumps, celebratory gestures, fist-pumps, synchronized movement, and comically mimed laser-rifle deaths that would express the excitement of video gaming, and support the scene's story. Each lift would be something the audience had never seen before; each moment on the couch would be different than the last. The coup de gras came late in the process—a synchronized motion of the actors' heads back and forth. I was and am shocked at how audiences respond emotionally to synchronized motion. In addition to being visually pleasing, the moment expressed Ted and Ri's acceptance of Cory into their world, and acknowledgement that she was a peer.

I didn't always consider the Viewpoints explicitly while building tableaus, but I had certainly internalized them through teaching, observing, and a few dozen hours of training. They helped me pack meaning into each tableau. One notable image came as Ri discussed his profound sadness over his mother's planned death. To highlight the sense of alienation, I put Ri across the room. He hunched over, his nose inches from a bottle of vodka, prominently perched on the piano. When Ted asked, "Have you gone to see her?" Ri responds, "A few days ago. She's still in the bed. Still still still. Like water." This gorgeous text emerged as a reaction to the environment.

*Galactic Orphans*' gravitational pull in my life hauled in my concurrent coursework, as well. Steven Dietz conducted a directing workshop during the early part of the semester. The subject of one of his lessons was the tension that arises when characters disagree about the scene they're playing. I immediately drew a link between

this concept, and one of the scenes that we'd rehearsed to death, but which kept falling flat. In the scene, called *A Soldier's Death*, Ted and Ri talk about nurses. Initially, the actors Jose (Ri) and Eli (Ted) played the exchange as ending in agreement that nurses "are sexy because they take care of people." However, working through the scene beat-by-beat, we saw that Ted's take-away from the conversation is, "I don't want to get old, man." The scene quickened as we realized that Ted hears a very different monologue (about the indignity of failing bodies) than the one Ri delivers (the nobility of nurses). I had the actors exaggerate this distinction, and the scene started to sizzle. Rather than offering a lesson on caretakers, the scene became about Ri's yearning for connection. He found a button for the end – he deflates, misunderstood and isolated, once again. Instead of focusing on Ted's final line, I drew attention to Ri's silent disappointment in the staging.

Beyond these discoveries, *Galactic Orphans* presented dramaturgical challenges, and opportunities to contribute to the development of a new play. For example, we found that the final scene was not stageable on our set, as written. The script had called for Cory to leap from one platform to another as if climbing a rock face, but our set offered no way to show an impressive leap that the actress playing Cory could execute safely. Further, any physical leap would require extensive rehearsal on the full set, and we did not have that time. Stumped, I suggested a devising session to find a new staging that would preserve the dramaturgical integrity and intention of the final scene. We needed a substantial obstacle for Cory to overcome on her way to rescuing her friend, Ri, from alien captivity.

Megan and I led the session, participating as performers. We improvised a military raid, diving for cover behind the couch, calling out orders, miming space-guns. The devising session revealed a potential framework for the scene, casting Tori—an actor who had no lines in the scene—as an alien boss who would pin down the siblings with space-rifle fire, only to be killed at close range by Cory.

After the euphoria of discovery dissipated, we encountered another problem. Robert Ramirez, a champion of representation and diversity in the department, observed a run-through and noted that the execution of the only actor of color onstage could be traumatic to witness for our student population. We could not risk being insensitive. When tech began, we restaged the scene, attempting to hide Cory's decisive and violent execution of the space alien behind a small set piece, but there was nowhere to hide on the platform. Adding to the complication, the revelation of the scene's tone-deafness created tension with the team, some of whom seemed defensive and rejected the scene's potential to wound audience members.

I note this predicament because it relates to the need for a director working "authentically" to attend to the needs of the community that creates the performance, and the community that witnesses it. Aware that swift action was needed, I contacted one of our co-curators, Steven Dietz, and described the problem. He agreed with our diagnosis of the issue, and offered the perfect solution. Cory didn't need to execute anyone onstage; if the alien retreated as Cory charged, then Cory would have the necessary victory for the scene. We tested the scene, and it worked. This dramaturgically effective staging was sensitive to all audience members, and avoided unnecessary trauma.

As tech commenced, I was less concerned about whether the production was "good" or "bad." I knew that if those terms had any meaning, it was already very good. What is important, however, is that the tech process brought forth even more discoveries. We squeezed three complicated effects into the production that deepened the play's expressivity at key moments, even in the production's impossibly short tech schedule.

The first of these effects supported the entrances of Catara—a video game cyborg who crosses over from game into the real world. The lighting effect we'd planned fell flat. Worse, the poster that had been created for Catara, which needed to be a portal into another dimension, was hanging limply on the set. All attempts to make a sliding door, or create a hidden slit in the poster, had been unsuccessful. We needed spectacle—light, sound and media—to support her entrance.

During the first tech rehearsal, I shuttled back and forth between the lighting, sound and media tables, coordinating an enhanced effect that would incorporate the strobe light, media content that would look like lightning, crawling up the poster, and the sound of a short-circuit. The idea was that we'd go to blackout as Catara enters the basement, as if crossing over from an alternate dimension shorted out the electricity in the house. This had two advantages. First, it would create a visually stunning spectacle around her entrance. Second, the mini-story of the house's electricity shorting out would cover the actress's entrance coming through the poster. As the designers created and implemented new content, the actress playing Catara practiced pulling one side of the poster aside and leaping through safely, to make the entrance as quick as possible. She needed to be able to do this in the dark. The effect worked very well.

The second major discovery during tech also arose as part of a solution to a major technical challenge. The climactic battle between Cory, Ted and the space alien was a gunfight, but without sound or lighting effects, it fell flat. I asked for strategically placed strobe lights and sound effects that would line up with the actors' mimed recoils. This turned out to be an extremely complicated effect, even for a 30-second scene.

The performers faced a substantial challenge. They would need to mimic the space-guns' recoils in a particular sequence each time, so that they would line up with the built and sequenced sound and lighting cues. To hedge against the risk of human error, the sound cue and lighting sequences were split into three sections of about ten seconds each. This gave the stage manager the power to get the sequences back on track if a performer made a mistake.

The actors learned to perform the space-gun battle as if it were a dance. The entire 30-second sequence took about 4 hours of non-tech and tech rehearsal to perfect, along with another half-dozen labor hours from the design team to implement. It provided the necessary level of verisimilitude and spectacle for the production's final battle.

The last, and most important discovery we made in tech came while rehearsing the reunion between Cory and her mother. I had always connected with this scene deeply. Its exquisite tension, for me, arose from the awareness that their profoundly longed-for moment of connection comes with their shared knowledge that they will never see each other again.

As we were rehearsing this scene, a member of the Design faculty, Michelle Habeck, tapped me on the shoulder and suggested that there may be a way to underline

the sense of connection between Cory and Catara, using light. I asked her to elaborate, but she would not, and directed me to talk with my lighting designer. I paused, looked at the stage for a moment, and it dawned on me immediately. I asked our Lighting Designer if she could fade the rest of the stage to red when Catara entered; she said yes. I asked if she could follow Catara with a moving white spot throughout the scene. Again, yes. I told the stage manager to spike the piano bench on which Cory and Ted sat, so that it would be in the exact same place every night. I saw a flash of recognition in the lighting designer's eyes, and we began to work quickly together to pull off the effect.

She followed Catara with a spot as she approached Cory, and at the moment they touched, the sound died away, and Catara and Cory were enveloped in the same white light leaving Ted in the darker, red light—separate from this reunion between mother and daughter. This became one of the signature moments of the play. It gave me chills every single night.

Memory can be slippery, but if I had to associate two feelings with my experience of *Galactic Orphans*, they would be discomfort and exhilaration. I now recognize that at least a part of the discomfort I felt while at work on the play to be what Anne Bogart calls "embarrassment." By inviting my most aggressively rigorous, bold and decisive self into the collaboration, I also experienced feelings of exposure, and risk. In Bogart's formulation, this feeling is linked with artistic expansiveness and freedom: "Embarrassment engenders a glow and a presence and a dissolving of habit." This dissolving of habit allowed for a persistent sense of discovery, which accounts for the feeling of exhilaration.

The process had been characterized by the application of sustained rigor. I had shed habits that were no longer useful. Now, my interest is in taming my ego's thirst for the ephemeral glory and heightened energy of opening night. Instead, I seek the humility and rigor of daily practice. I wish to remember the ritualized work that went into *Galactic Orphans*, and to find ways to replicate the same ongoing sense of discovery I experienced at that time.

## 4. *The Noir Project*

*The Noir Project* began in the fall of my second year, as the focus of a course taught by Liz Engelman called Professional Development Workshop ("PDW"). Prior to and during this course, I laid the conceptual groundwork for the piece, and developed a series of movement-driven scenes that became the seed for a project during the ensuing year. Throughout and after PDW, I built a community of collaborators in order to stage a production of the piece in the summer after my graduation, in 2018. It is most useful to divide this project into two phases, both concluding with collapsed collaborations. First, I worked with playwright Daria Miyeko-Marinelli, who was my collaborator in PDW. Later, I worked with Joanna Garner, a professional who finished her MFA in Playwriting at UT in 2016, two years before me. Both collaborations failed. In this chapter, I trace the roots of these failures, and point to critical moments in this project's progress wherein it felt as if the project was emerging authentically. This project remains in development.

I conceived the piece in the fall of 2016, as an exploration of my own gender, and an attempt to wrestle with what I'll call my "toxicity." By "toxicity," I mean behaviors associated with my privilege as a white cis-hetero man, and certain subconscious biases: Misogyny, homophobia, and a sense of entitlement. I formulated a question early on: "How do you live with vulnerability when your identity is rooted in impossible strength?" This question pointed toward my difficulty accessing vulnerability and authenticity, due to my need to project strength. Several pieces of literature related this need to project strength to my socialization as a man in our patriarchal culture. bell

hooks' short essay, "Understanding Patriarchy," was particularly important and apropos in my reflection on my experience of my own gender:

> *Patriarchy is the single most life-threatening social disease assaulting the male body and spirit in our nation…Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence.*

Other writers also worked their way into my thinking, such as Wendell Berry: "If we removed the status and material compensation from the destructive exploits we classify as 'manly,' men would be found to be suffering as much as women." This quote put words to my sense that toxicity was causing subconscious suffering, and alienation. It also gave me a sense that deconstructing my "impossible strength" and accessing vulnerability might be of value to others in our culture, and relieve suffering. That seemed a worthy goal.

I approached Daria to collaborate in October of 2016, and proposed a working arrangement whereby I would lead a devising ensemble to develop content, while she would generate the script. At our first meeting dedicated to the project, I proposed using the film noir detective—an avatar for hyper-masculinity that remains popular—as an

anchor for the project. Daria suggested alternatives for this idea, while I kept digging into the importance of the film noir detective. We disagreed profoundly over this point.

Over winter break, I researched the film noir detective and attempted to bolster my case for the decision to use it as an anchor for the project. I read books about noir fiction and its relationship to whiteness, masculinity, and toxicity. I also re-read several classic noir novels by Raymond Chandler—and author for whom I have a particular affinity. During this period, Daria and I communicated extensively via email, phone, video conference, and in person, but we grew no closer to an agreement. As the spring semester commenced, the project stalled and our collaboration turned sour.

About two months into the semester, I met with playwright Joanna Garner, who expressed enthusiasm for the film noir detective as an anchor for a project investigating why young men feel so alienated in American culture. She proposed an immersive journey for the audience as part of the production. We agreed to collaborate in a devising process. I would lead an ensemble, and Joanna would shape the narrative and develop a script, based on the ensemble's discoveries. I informed Daria that we would no longer pursue the noir detective as an anchor, and instead we would focus on male adolescent socialization. The PDW piece would be called *Jacob*.

I'd hoped that removing noir from my conversation with Daria would ease the tension in our collaboration, but our relationship remained unstable. We couldn't agree on the story points for *Jacob*. For our second showing (of three) in PDW, I brought devising exercises to the class around masculinity. They were extremely revealing and

reflected back the potential value in exposing emotions that patriarchal culture suppresses in men: Playfulness, intimacy, and vulnerability. For me, the project had opened up. Buoyed by these discoveries, I commenced rehearsals with an ensemble of four performers. Meanwhile, my relationship with Daria had reached an impasse, so we modified our working agreement: I would be the generative artist on the project, and Daria would provide dramaturgical support, with no expectation of writing a script. We also decided that, since Daria would not be writing any of the script, there would be no problem with exploring film noir in the context of the course.

However, my work with the ensemble stalled. As the date for the final showing approached, I experimented with composing my own script. I wrote about six pages that Daria read and provided feedback on, but it did not feel authentic to me. At almost the last possible moment, my PDW respondent, David Neumann, provided critical support. We met for beers on a Monday, and I confessed that I had never wanted to create a traditional script, but felt as if it were the only way forward. In a wonderfully vulnerable and candid conversation, he teased out my desire to generate content through movement and choreography, using text as a springboard, rather than a blueprint. He also suggested ways forward, for the project, even on a short time-frame.

With David's encouragement, I assembled fragments and scenarios from the screenplay of *The Maltese Falcon*. I spent the week rehearsing with the ensemble, then David and Daria joined us in observational roles for two 4-hour rehearsals over the ensuing weekend. What emerged was a 20-minute presentation comprising scenes that operated according to a kind of dream-logic, using repetition and movement to reveal

what's hidden beneath Sam Spade's macho swagger. Where Spade's words were hard-boiled, I depicted longing and loneliness. Where they were homophobic, I portrayed a yearning for intimacy. Where they were violent, I depicted Spade's fear of being traumatized. Where they boasted, I staged his terror. The final showing felt like a breakthrough. By trusting and following my intuition, I'd arrived at a vibrant, playful, meaningful performance gesture that felt true to my intentions—a key feature of authentic directing.

The collaboration with Daria, however, had failed. It is worth examining the reasons why. First: We clashed early on about the piece's aims and form, and we became deeply divided and alienated from one another. Rather than continuing to dig in my heels, I should have opened up a genuine question: "Is the noir detective the appropriate anchor for this project?" Another point of contention was my early ambition for the piece to address a social problem. Daria was resistant to this idea, as was the rest of the PDW cohort. In fact, the piece opened up late in the semester in collaboration with David, who steered me toward an exploration of my own personal experience. By letting go of any ambition to teach or proselytize, I was able to make a much more intriguing, specific, and vulnerable piece. Finally, I was not transparent with Daria—or myself—about the reasons I had for abandoning the noir detective, as an anchor. I had created a parallel project that was almost identical to my work in PDW. My lack of candor created a rift between Daria and me from which it was extremely difficult to recover.

I decided to put the collaboration behind me, however, and moved on to work with Joanna. I had archived the final PDW showing on video, and brought it to Joanna as an

inspiration for the piece. This was awkward, because it disrupted what had been a shared focus on an immersive experience for the audience. In this decision and disruption, there were shades of the same conflict that I'd experienced with Daria—I argued for with material that I was passionate about, assuming that there would be room for immersive elements in the final product.

At the end of my penultimate year in grad school, I poured producing effort into *The Noir Project*. These efforts seemed to prop up my collaboration with Joanna, in spite of our differing views about its direction. I recruited a large group of artists to form the core of an ensemble. I applied for, and received, a grant from the City of Austin's Cultural Arts Committee with which to partially fund a full production. Finally, I submitted an application to Fusebox—a hybrid arts festival in Austin—and our application reached the final round. Fusebox offered the opportunity for substantial production and marketing support and an injection of cash. Due to its popularity in Austin, it also offered an increased incentive for local professionals to participate in an extended devising process. These production-related incentives allowed me to ignore the fissures in my collaboration with Joanna for many months. And indeed, we stayed in contact and seemed to have good morale and a good rapport with one another during the summer and fall.

When our Fusebox application was finally rejected, I decided that a sustained devising process would not be possible. I proposed to Joanna that we should embrace that fact, and we altered the plan again. I would provide dramaturgical support on a script that Joanna would write. In a stroke of luck, I was able to book one of Austin's premiere

venues for our piece: A 250-seat black box theater called the Rollins Studio. This kept my hope for a summer 2018 production alive.

However, this was another major turning point in the project's development. Instead of a devising process that Joanna would respond to, we committed to an accelerated script-development process, with few guardrails. Also, at this point in the process, I committed myself to a supporting role in Joanna's playwriting process while hiring a choreographer to recreate and expand on my original PDW workshop showing. Essentially, I gave up the generative role I'd played when the project felt most authentic to me. This felt like a small price to pay for a production, at the time, but later it would become extremely important.

To facilitate script development, I applied for us to attend a residency in Creede, Colorado. My application was accepted, creating our first opportunity to be in the same physical space since the previous year. On the first night of our residency, Joanna expressed trepidation that she might be the wrong artist for the project, since she was not a choreographically minded writer, and her passion for immersive theater was no longer foregrounded in the project. In conversation with her, I bracketed off the "how" and focused on the "why" - on the piece's purpose, and animating question. This inspired a bull session in which Joanna and I mapped out the story, scene-by-scene. She churned out dozens of pages over the course of the residency, and apparently acquired so much confidence that she made space in her script for the type of movement I had created in my PDW workshop. It seemed that my focus on the piece's intention had created a purpose that Joanna could share and serve. The project felt back on solid ground. My

faculty mentors, KJ Sanchez and Steven Dietz, offered $1,000 to facilitate Joanna's visit to UT-Austin for another developmental residency.

I planned a "workshop reading" that would combine Joanna's script with choreography by a local professional, Kelsey Oliver. Working with Kelsey, I planned the movement sections that would be choreographed and led the initial rehearsals before handing them off to her (we were only able to convene 14 rehearsals, due to logistical constraints). I transferred control of these rehearsals in order to devote time to being Joanna's dramaturg and the director of her script-development sessions.

Joanna's residency in Austin began with great promise. She asked to end the first rehearsal early in order to write, and generated 15 new pages for the following evening. Later in the week, she generated another 10 pages. Our public reading indicated to me that, in spite of major strides, critical sections of the script needed substantial revision. This did not seem like a problem to me, so long as we could have a healthy conversation about what we learned (what worked, what didn't, what we know now that we didn't before) after the workshop concluded. Unfortunately, I was unable to convene that conversation and found that I'd lost a productive rapport with Joanna.

Rather than force a production, I decided to suspend the project. I paid all of the collaborators what I'd promised them, including Joanna. I also ate the cost of renting the Long Center—one of the most expensive venues in Austin.

My initial draft of this thesis chapter was written immediately following my residency with Joanna in Colorado. Our collaboration seemed on solid ground at that time, and I expressed optimism about its outcome. There was good reason for this

optimism: I had sustained a collaboration with a professional playwright over a lengthy period of time, and experienced bursts of shared purpose and creativity with her. In spite of occasional glimpses of a rift between us, we seemed to have good morale. *The Noir Project* featured none of the paralysis or procrastination that marked *A Nervous Breakdown*. I'd gathered a large team of collaborators, secured a residency, a mixture of public and private funding, and an excellent venue.

In spite of all this, the collaboration collapsed. The reasons trace back to important turning points in our collaboration. I had originally enlisted Joanna to work on an immersive theater piece—her bread and butter. But I radically changed the piece's focus to choreography and movement. The promise of a production allowed me to ignore the friction arising from this radical change in focus for months, until it was too late.

Another reason the collaboration failed was that I had intended a piece that would allow me to lead a devising ensemble, with Joanna responding and shaping the narrative. That plan fell through, and Joanna became the primary artist within the collaboration—a role neither of us had originally envisioned for her. Further, the post-mortem revealed that in hiring Kelsey, I'd excluded myself from the work that I'd been most passionate about in the first place.

Finally, our collaboration failed because I pressed Joanna for clarity about her process immediately after the public reading in Austin. I did not give her enough space to process the experience, but allowed my anxiety about the impending production to drive my behavior, and inquiry. This caused tension and our rapport suffered.

While errors in judgment led to a difficult situation with Joanna, I do consider my decision to end the collaboration to have been a healthy one. Nobody quit, or threatened to. However, I decided it was time to step away. Much of my decision-making and labor on *The Noir Project* was driven by a desire for a production. As a result, the project had become something from which I felt disconnected, and in which I felt marginalized. I was no longer certain that the project would manifest any degree of authenticity.

Joanna and I parted ways amicably. She retained control of the script, while I had the freedom to continue exploring my experience of masculinity, with the noir detective as an anchor. I needed more time with the material and with the piece, rather than the opportunity for a full production. I needed to reclaim my authentic intention and passion for the piece.

## 5. Physical Theater: Dance, Movement, and the Human Body

Over the past decade, and particularly during my time at UT-Austin, physical theater training has enhanced my work's authenticity in critical ways. First, this training encourages self-acceptance. By challenging my insecurities, I have become a more trusting (and trusted) collaborator. This has led to better leadership of communities of artists around almost any type of project—a key feature of authentic directing. Second: Physical theater training has provided me with a theatrical language with which to convey particularly rich ideas. My work has greater immediacy and precision than before. Authentic directing depends on clear expression of purpose. The tactics provided by physical theater training have thus expanded and deepened my authentic directorial voice. Finally: Reflecting on my embodied artistic practice has helped me explore new ideas, centered around my life and embodied experience. It has literally given me new purpose. For these reasons, physical theater training has helped me become a more authentic director.

Artistic teams—small communities—are built on trust. If a person can't trust themselves, then they can't trust anyone else. I was first attracted to movement training because it helped me overcome my self-consciousness, encouraged self-acceptance, and allowed me to trust others more deeply.

My body is the source of many nagging insecurities. For as long as I can remember, I've felt overweight. My hair is thick and grows up and away from my head; my freckles

have little hairs sprouting from them. My chin is not prominent. Any of these reminders of my non-ideal body can awaken my insecurity, at any moment.

Movement training has helped me overcome these insecurities. In 2011, I directed a play called *Flying* that included stylized movement. Our rehearsal process started with a week of Viewpoints/Suzuki workshops led by a movement coach, Adriene Mishler. I participated in these workshops, along with the performers. We began each rehearsal with a sequence of sun salutations performed in unison to the rhythm of our breathing. Breath, in this ritual, acquired profound meaning. Adriene drew attention to our bodies' shared need for oxygen and our constant state of replenishment and renewal. I learned from this exercise to reflect on my need to care for my body, and that care bred a sense of self-love and acceptance. No matter my body's imperfections, it was worthy of being nurtured. In almost all of my directing projects, I start rehearsals with sun salutations, conducted in unison with performers' breathing, in order to summon the same sense of gratitude and well-being that Adriene cultivated in her rehearsals. Those rehearsals were essential to building community during the *Flying* production process.

Physical theater training I've experienced as an MFA candidate has taught me to trust my body as a creative instrument, as well. The Viewpoints, in particular, have been a touchstone. Developed by director Anne Bogart, the Viewpoints emphasize choreographic composition, the body's sensitivity to stimuli beyond the five senses, and its potential as a generative instrument in performance. During my training at UT-Austin, I've encountered the Viewpoints in coursework, personal study, teaching and production processes.

Over the course of my final semester at UT, my graduate directing course has engaged in extensive Viewpoints training. Each week brings a new workshop designed to apply a new concept that helps performers express choreographically, through time and space. This training depends on deep listening and sensitivity to one's surroundings. The results can be astonishing: I've participated in exercises during which ensembles of between 5 and 10 members find themselves moving in perfect unison, or creating precise tableaus with astonishing pace and precision. The experience of relying on my body and instincts to rapidly improvise with other ensemble members has been revelatory, to say the least. The trust and shared sense of growth with other ensemble members creates a powerful sense of community.

During my time as an MFA candidate, I've engaged in several movement-based production processes, and each has enhanced my ability to articulate complex emotions and ideas with greater precision—and therefore with greater authenticity—than when I arrived. In the fall of my second year, I developed *The Sonnets Project*. A riff on José Rivera's *Sonnets for an Old Century*, this piece featured an ensemble of undergraduates who generated monologues inspired by their attitudes toward death. For each scene, I deployed stylized movement that echoed, supported, or worked in contrast with the content of the scene. We staged the production in the Winship basement, which the audience entered via freight elevator.

*Sonnets* provided a laboratory for many experiments, including repeated gestures in space (unison movement), in time (sequential movement and visual rhythms), choreography consisting of poetic gestures, and gestures derived from human behavior.

The last category of choreography was important during a monologue developed by a performer named Oktavea Butler. Oktavea, who is black, wrote a poem about her fear of being killed by law enforcement officers. I created choreography for the ensemble that echoed the positions these young people would assume if stopped by police: Braced on the wall, frisked, then hit by a bullet. The monologue was extremely memorable, and taught me to create a visual narrative that supports and echoes a written performance text. The texts—visual and spoken—worked in concert, conveying rich and complicated layers of meaning. Although the monologue was short—only about three minutes—it was an important experience in my physical theater training.

During the same semester in which I directed *The Sonnets Project*, I created a movement-based piece about the experience of witnessing Andy's death, framed by an archetypical journey described in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Called *Luminosity*, this piece allowed me to use dance to convey complex emotions. While short, this was one of the most coherent and effective pieces I made in graduate school.

With *Luminosity*, I learned to organize a system of abstract gestures that became an almost-independent language with deep meaning. The most memorable moment came while working with a performer named Max, who portrayed a bereft father, grieving for his son. I led Max in a choreography exercise that portrayed his sadness metaphorically as fire. Max performed as fire during our rehearsal together, at one point torqueing like a huge, twisting tower of flame. We both realized that he'd created a very distinct and memorable gesture. It became a motif, repeated throughout a dance sequence as an expression of his longing for his son. In one moment, the torqueing gesture took the place

of a desperate cry of bereavement. His dead son—portrayed as present at the family dinner table, but unseen by his loved ones—mimicked the gesture as an attempt to connect with his father from beyond the grave. As it was repeated at various critical moments in the story, the torqueing gesture acquired its own complex meaning, which felt particularly rich in its expression of the experience of grief. This experience helped enhance my expressivity with gesture and choreography. Since authentic directing depends on clarity, this new tool—and many others I acquired during my training—helped my authentic directorial voice to emerge.

Finally, physical theater training has expanded my sense of purpose to include new ideas arising from reflecting on my embodied experience. *The Noir Project*, for example, coalesced when I decided to cease writing a new script, and generate a piece based on my reflections on my gender, and an investigation of the sociological concept of manhood. The work came alive through exploration of behaviors associated with manhood: Hugs ending with pats on the back, leering at women, homophobia that became violent. These behaviors defined manhood as aggressive (even during expressions of intimacy), hostile to women, hostile toward "unmanly" emotions, and obsessed with punishing homosexuality. I knew these behaviors well because I'd grown up in a patriarchal culture that prized them, and thereby emotionally twisted and alienated the men who lived in that culture.

The work I developed mixed manhood's typical gestures and behaviors with scenarios from *The Maltese Falcon's* 1941 screenplay, which I observed as depicting an extreme (and extremely popular) form of manhood through Sam Spade, the detective

played by Humphrey Bogart. Using devising exercises that emphasized repetition, I twisted the gestures and scenarios until they became less masculine, and more feminized. The resulting choreography recast "feminine" behavior as desirable and good, and "masculine" behavior as almost grotesque.

For example, in one scene, two performers slapped each other's backs repeatedly until the gesture became a semi-erotic expression of intimacy they had both suppressed. Another scene featured a character dismissing a woman's grief over her dead friend with the words "Now, now," until the phrase became a desperate expression of self-pity and grief. Finally, one scene centered on Sam Spade's famous line from the movie, "When you get slapped, you'll take it and like it!" In *The Maltese Falcon*, the line accompanies Spade slapping Joel Cairo—a character who is coded as homosexual—in the face. In performance, The slap was stylized and repeated, emerging as a re-enactment of trauma that had been inflicted on Spade in his childhood. The movement sketch recast Spade as a victim, and therefore one who is "emasculated." Without my physical theater training and reflection on my own experiences as a male who lives in a culture that prizes a damaging brand of "manhood," I never would have made this work. My physical theater training allowed me to access these concerns, and give them expression, resulting in greater authenticity in my directing.

As I complete my MFA training, I now know myself to be a choreographically minded director whose work has a distinct physical quality. But looking back, the roots of my interest in physical theater have always been present. The story that forms my thesis' introduction, for example, recounts my brother's complete cessation of all movement,

which accompanied his most profound transformation: From life into death. Movement carries deep meaning for me, and I am grateful that my training at UT-Austin has allowed me to explore this meaning richly and authentically.

## 6. Conclusion: The Purpose of Authenticity

It is worth asking, "why be authentic?" One can move through the world in an inauthentic way and still collect awards, popularity and power. But these external effects are fickle, temporary and unpredictably distributed. There is also no necessary correlation between meaningful performances, and external rewards.

The type of live performance that I want to make is transformative. It emerges from the core of a director's being and enters the world with clarity, generosity, force and precision. It creates an indelible memory and experience of community among participants—both those who create it, and those who receive it. I cited the ritual of sitting vigil for my brother as an example of a performance that transformed its witnesses and participants. However, the potential for transformation is ever-present. My work is to make myself constantly available to impulses that might generate a transformative performance. My work is to remain alive to the possibility of a miracle at every moment. The only way to do this is to sustain my full presence in an authentic directing practice.

The implications of this statement are profound, and the costs of continuing to drive toward an authentic directing are high. I must continue to develop my craft. I must ensure that my actions reflect my system of values, and support a healthy lifestyle. I will continue to feel the pain of being judged. I will continue to endure failure. My ego and sense of attachment to material success must be tamed. My work must become a ritual. And all of my performances must become as sacred as the closing of a curtain in a certain hospital on April 7th, 2014.

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